

## The role of ethnic identification, allyship, and conflict narratives in supporting pro-minority policies among majority and minority groups

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** Using the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, Studies 1 and 2 tested how ethnic identification predicted support for minority rights through the pathway of the endorsement of the conflict narrative of the minority group (i.e., independence narrative) among Kurds (Study 1) and Turks (Study 2) in Turkey. Study 2 tested whether the paths between (1) ethnic identification and endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative and (2) endorsement of the minority group's conflict and support for minority rights would be moderated by ally identification (i.e., Turkish ally identification). **Methods:** 201 self-identified Kurdish participants in Study 1 and 271 self-identified Turkish participants in Study 2 participated in an online survey voluntarily. **Results:** In Study 1, stronger Kurdish identification predicted more support for minority rights through the pathway of more endorsement of the independence narrative. Study 2 showed the opposite findings with regard to the relationship between ethnic identification and support for minority rights. For the majority group, higher ethnic identification predicted less support for minority rights, through the pathway of less endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative. Study 2 also found that the strength of the relationship between (1) ethnic identification and endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative is particularly strong among strong allies, whereas the strength of the relationship between (2) endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative and support for minority rights is particularly strong among weak allies. **Conclusions:** Results point to the important relationship between ethnic and ally identities, conflict narratives, and intergroup-related outcomes.

**Keywords:** Ethnic identification, conflict narratives, ally identity, minority rights, Turkish-Kurdish conflict

**Public Significance Statement:** The current research aims to investigate the relationship between ethnic identification and support for minority rights among both minority groups and

majority group members by examining how endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative may play an important role in this relationship. Our studies may pave the way for positive intergroup relations in conflict contexts by demonstrating how 1) ethnic identity (albeit depending on group status), 2) ally identity, and 3) minority group's conflict narratives may become facilitators to supporting policies that aim to improve the position of minority groups in society.

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**The role of ethnic identification, allyship and conflict narratives in supporting pro-minority policies among majority and minority groups**

Ethnic identity plays a crucial role in ethnic-based conflict contexts. Identity dynamics in those contexts shape how people understand conflict, how they see their own group's role in the conflict, and how they support policies aiming to resolve it. For instance, even though ethnic identification may predict people's (lack of) support for minority rights or multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006), such effects look different for the majority and minority group members. Among minority group members, higher ethnic identification is related to higher endorsement of multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Among majority group members, on the other hand, higher ethnic identification is associated with less endorsement of multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006), more negative attitudes toward minorities (Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, Philips, & Denney, 2012), and more outgroup derogation (Mummendey, Klink & Brown, 2001).

Although some studies have shown the differing relationship between ethnic identification and intergroup outcomes such as engaging in competitive victimhood (Bağcı, Piyale, Karaköse, & Şen, in press) and supporting minority groups (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006), little is known about how endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative may play a critical role in this relationship, especially for majority group members. We first argue that ethnic identification in ethnic-based conflict contexts may play a filter role in how people see conflict as "shared social identity is the precondition for the formation of shared beliefs" in conflict contexts (Bar-Tal & Oren, 2000, p. 3).

We also argue that in conflict contexts where minority groups' rights are denied, seeing the conflict from the eyes of the minority (i.e., endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative) may predict support for minority rights. The current research aims to investigate the relationship between ethnic identification and support for minority rights through the pathway

of endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative among both minority groups (Kurds in Turkey; Study 1) and majority group members (Turks in Turkey; Study 2) in the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.

### **The Role of Ethnic Identification in Supporting Minority Rights**

Ethnic identification has many intergroup-related outcomes, both for majority and minority group members. Although ethnic identification has some positive outcomes for minority group members such as higher well-being (Zdrenka, Yogeeswaran, Stronge, & Sibley, 2015) and more support for ideologies that challenge the legitimacy of the status hierarchy (Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, & Federico, 1998), it also has adverse consequences for intergroup relations. For example, among members of minority groups, higher ethnic identification is associated with more negative views of (Negy, Shreve, Jensen, & Uddin, 2003) or negative attitudes toward outgroup members (Bağcı & Çelebi, 2017).

For members of minority groups, the possibility of maintaining cultural heritage seems to be important in itself when this minority identity is under threat, faces discrimination, or is denied as in many ethnic conflict contexts (Hindriks, Verkuyten, & Coenders, 2017).

Minority group members tend to identify with their ethnic identity more when they consider this identity crucial to preserve their own culture (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). An emphasis on supporting minority rights may, therefore, represent a collective response to negative group identity (see Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Scheepers, Gijssberts, & Coenders, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is not surprising that a positive association has been found between ethnic group identification and the endorsement of minority rights (i.e., support for language rights) among minority group members (Çelebi, Verkuyten, & Smyrnioti, 2016). Similarly, Verkuyten and his colleagues found strong support for minority rights among ethnic minorities (predominantly Turkish Dutchs) compared to ethnic majority group (i.e., Dutch;

see, e.g., Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006).

In contrast, strong ethnic identification among majority group members has different intergroup outcomes. For example, highly identified members of majority groups are less inclined to recognize inequality, as acknowledgment of inequality could be threatening to the perceived legitimacy of their group's advantaged position (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Related work also suggests that higher ethnic identification among majority group members is associated with more negative attitudes toward minorities (Stewart et al., 2012), a greater motivation to protect the interests of their ingroup (Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006) and more outgroup derogation (Mummendey et al., 2001).

For the majority group, identification is negatively related to supporting minority rights (see Verkuyten, 2006) because the minority rights and related ideological notions are seen as a threat to their privileges and power. One particular study by Çelebi et al. (2016) showed that higher ethnic identification is associated with lower support for Kurdish language rights in Turkey. Even though some studies have shown the differing relationship between ethnic identification and intergroup outcomes among both minority and majority group members, little is known about how endorsing minority group's conflict narrative may play a role in this relationship. We argue that ethnic identity in ethnic-based conflict contexts may be associated with how people see conflict as ethnic identity helps ethnic group members form shared beliefs in conflict contexts (see, e.g., Bar-Tal & Oren, 2000) and understand the conflict from their group's own perspective. In this respect, as majority group members who highly identify with their ethnic group tend to see the conflict from their own group's perspective (i.e., endorsing majority group's conflict narrative), we expect that they would endorse minority group's conflict narrative less and this, in turn, would become a barrier to supporting minority rights. On the other hand, as minority group members who highly

identify with their ethnic group tend to see the conflict from their own group's perspective (i.e., endorsing minority group's conflict narrative), we expect that they would endorse the minority group's conflict narrative more, and this, in turn, would help them support their own rights.

### **Minority vs. Majority Groups' Conflict Narratives and Intergroup Outcomes**

Bar-Tal (1998, 2007) introduced the idea of the ethos of conflict (i.e., dominant conflict narrative endorsed by the majority group) to explain how people understand and view conflict. People in conflict-ridden societies cope with the conflict by developing socially shared beliefs about it. A number of studies have found that endorsement of the ethos of conflict has consequences for conflict- and peace-related outcomes. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict context, endorsement of the ethos of conflict reduced support for compromise and peaceful conflict resolution (Canetti, Elad-Strenger, Lavi, Guy, & Bar-Tal, 2017) and increased positive stereotyping of Jews and negative stereotyping of Palestinians (Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv, & Dgani-Hirsh, 2009). Not only does this dominant narrative causes an escalation of the conflict, but it may also affect the processing and interpretation of new information in ways contribute to the continuation of the conflict and reduce the likelihood of peaceful resolution (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Porat, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2015), and thus may create social-psychological barriers to conflict resolution and reconciliation (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011).

In the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context, some studies have also shown the role of dominant conflict narrative (i.e., *terrorism narrative*) in intergroup-related outcomes. For example, endorsement of the terrorism narrative, which describes the problem as stemming mainly from the armed wing of the Kurdish national movement PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan), predicts negative attitudes towards reconciliation and the peace process (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017), more support for aggressive policies and less support for stopping violence

(Uluğ, Lickel, Leidner, & Hirschberger, 2020) as well as less solidarity with the minority group (i.e., Kurds; Uluğ, 2020) among majority group members (i.e., Turks).

To provide a more comprehensive perspective on conflict narratives and their effects on conflict and to capture the complexity of a particular conflict and its consequences, researchers have recently started to examine the effects of alternative conflict narratives together with the dominant narrative (see Cohrs et al., 2015). Researchers argue that complementing the research conducted by Bar-Tal and others on the ethos of conflict in this way can deepen the discussion about the consequences of conflict narratives on conflict resolution, prevention, and peacebuilding (Uluğ et al., 2020a). These alternative conflict narratives may pave the way for conflict resolution due to their potential to increase openness to compromise and can help to diversify the social realities that circulate in society, especially when endorsed by majority group members (i.e., *allies*).

A few studies have also focused on what happens when majority group members endorse alternative conflict narratives (e.g., minority group's conflict narrative). In the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and Israeli-Palestinian conflict contexts, endorsement of the independence narrative, which describes the problem as a need for independence for Kurds, has been associated with more positive attitudes toward the peace process (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017), less competitive victimhood, less support for aggressive policies, more support for non-violent conflict resolution (Uluğ et al., 2020a) as well as more solidarity with the minority group (Uluğ, 2020).

Even though recent evidence suggests that endorsement of conflict narratives play an important role in shaping intergroup outcomes in conflict contexts (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017; Uluğ et al., 2020a), no previous study has investigated the role of endorsement of conflict narratives, especially endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative, in support for minority rights. However, in order to improve intergroup relations in conflict contexts, we



first need to examine how endorsing conflict narratives may play an important role in predicting support for minority rights. In our studies, minority rights are conceptualized as “*rights beyond citizenship rights*” (Bayir, 2016, p. 5), such as cultural, educational, linguistic, and political rights.

We also need to investigate these relationships from the eyes of majority and minority group members whose views on the conflict are usually different and whose support for minority rights differ as well. In addition to minority group members’ support for minority rights, to be able to bring about social change, majority group members’ support for those rights is needed. Some majority group members who self-identify as *allies to minority group members* tend to support minority rights more than non-allies. It is our aim in this research program to examine the relationship between endorsing the minority group’s conflict narrative and support for minority rights among both minority and majority group members in Turkey as well as majority group members who self-identify as *allies* to minority groups.

### **The Role of Allies in Conflict**

Researchers have paid increasing attention to members of majority groups who are *allies* to minority group members (e.g., Case, 2012; Fingerhut, 2011; Ostrove & Brown, 2018). Allies can be defined as majority group members who build relationships with members of minority groups and advocate egalitarian ideals and social justice (Ashburn-Nardo, 2018) and take action against the oppression of members of minority groups (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997). Allies are distinguished from non-allies in many respects. For example, they tend to have lower prejudice, higher internal motivation to respond without prejudice, and higher awareness of privilege (Ostrove & Brown, 2018) than non-allies. They also tend to less identify with their advantaged identity (see Study 2; Uluğ & Tropp, 2020) and be more ingroup critical (Case, 2012).

In addition to these key attitudinal characteristics, allies also have different behavioral characteristics. To give an example, allies tend to become more active in social justice movements (Curtin, Kende, & Kende, 2016) and take more action on behalf of the minority groups to bring about social change (Droogendyk, Louis, & Wright, 2016; Uluğ & Tropp, 2020). These actions may range from giving up their privileges conferred by their group status through their support for non-dominant groups (Brown & Ostrove, 2013), to working to end oppression (Broido, 2000) as well as to showing up to the protests for social justice (e.g., Whites showing up to racial justice protests; Tropp & Uluğ, 2019).

In social psychology, allyship has been mostly studied in collective action research, and studies have mostly focused on understanding the factors that mobilize majority group members to advocate for social change (e.g., Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006; Selvanathan, Techakesari, Tropp, & Barlow, 2018; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009). Previous studies have shown that meaningful intergroup contact experiences of majority group members with minority group members (Tropp & Barlow, 2018), emotions such as anger about outgroup disadvantage (Leach et al., 2006) and guilt about ingroup advantage (Selvanathan et al., 2018), and outgroup empathy (Mallett, Huntsinger, Sinclair, & Swim, 2008), as well as moral conviction and/or beliefs in the efficacy of such action (van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011), may predict majority group members' willingness to take action on behalf of minority group members.

Allies can play a critical role not only in social movements but also in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, far too little attention has been paid to how allies facilitate conflict resolution and peacebuilding by leveraging their majority status. One study conducted by Uluğ, McLamore, Leidner, and Hirschberger (2020b) showed that allies in conflict contexts adhere to conflict narratives that are inclusive of outgroup suffering and do not ignore ingroup-committed violence. As allies are also less identified with their advantaged

identity and to be more ingroup critical (Case, 2012; Uluğ & Tropp, 2020), we argue that in conflict contexts where minority groups' rights are usually denied, *allies* may see the conflict by taking the perspective of minority group members. To signal solidarity in the hopes of making minority group members feel heard and understood (see, e.g., Selvanathan, Lickel & Dasgupta, 2020), they may endorse the minority group's conflict narrative. Therefore, we hypothesize that ally identification (i.e., Turkish ally) among the majority group members would moderate the relationship between ethnic identification and endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative. We expect that the strength of the relationship between ethnic identification and endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative would be particularly strong among strong allies.

### **Overview of Studies**

The Turkish-Kurdish conflict is an intractable conflict that has been ongoing for decades. After the foundation of the modern Republic of Turkey in 1923, non-Turkish identities such as Kurdish identity and their cultural expressions were denied and repressed by the Turkish state under the state ideology, Kemalism (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997). As this ideology aims to homogenize the people in Turkey under the "Turkish" identity and leaves no room for being a Kurd (Yavuz & Özcan, 2006), it is fair to argue that Turks who endorse the official ideology of Turkey tend to identify more with their ethnic Turkish identity. In contrast, Kurds who reject this official ideology tend to identify more with their ethnic Kurdish identity.

In two studies, we investigated the role of ethnic identification on the endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative (i.e., independence narrative) and support for minority rights among a minority group, Kurds (Study 1), and a majority group, Turks (Study 2), in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context in Turkey. We hypothesized that stronger ethnic identification would predict *more* support for minority rights among the minority group and

*less* support for minority rights among the majority group. We also hypothesized that ethnic identification would predict an important process variable: *endorsement of conflict narrative*. In other words, we predicted that ethnic identification would predict support for minority rights through the pathway of endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative in both studies.

In Study 2, we also brought another identity into play: *ally identity*. In the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context, allies can be defined as Turks who support Kurdish rights in general even though they may have different positions on which rights should be supported. As allies may identify with their ingroup less, adhere to conflict narratives that are inclusive of outgroup suffering and support social justice more, in Study 2, we also hypothesized that the paths between (1) ethnic identification and endorsement of the independence narrative; and (2) endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights would be moderated by ally identification among majority group members. We expected that the strength of the relationships for both paths would be particularly strong among strong allies. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model for the minority group (i.e., Kurds) and Figure 2 for the majority group (i.e., Turks).

[Insert Figure 1]

[Insert Figure 2]

### **Study 1**

#### **Method**

##### **Participants and Procedure**

We received IRB approval for this research from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. We distributed the link to the survey on Facebook and Twitter. A total of 201 self-identified Kurdish participants were recruited. Seventy-five participants self-identified as female, 123 as male, two as other, and one did not respond. Participants' ages ranged from 18

to 62 years ( $M = 30.85$ ,  $SD = 8.43$ ). Ten participants had completed a PhD degree, 32 an MSc degree, 127 a university degree, 29 high school, two primary school, and one did not answer. All participants completed the online questionnaire voluntarily.

### Measures

With the exception of the demographic items mentioned above, all items used 5-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). All means and *SDs* are reported in Table 1.

**Ethnic identification.** Ethnic Kurdish identification was assessed by adapting four items from van Zomeren, Leach, and Spears (2010). These items were “*I see myself as a typical Kurd*,” “*I am glad to be a Kurd*,” “*I feel strong ties with other Kurds*,” and “*I identify with other Kurds*” ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Endorsement of the minority group’s conflict narrative.** In this study, we utilized the minority narrative we identified in our previous research with lay people (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2016), called the independence narrative. In the previous study, Q methodology, a mixed qualitative-quantitative method (Watts & Stenner, 2012), was used to identify socially shared perspectives about the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Based on the findings of that research, we put together a brief statement representing the core tenets of the minority narrative. Participants were asked to indicate their endorsement of the statement: “In my opinion, the Kurdish problem is an independence problem for Kurds because the status of Kurds living in Turkey is like a colony under the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, to solve this problem, an independent Kurdistan should be established, and its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan,<sup>1</sup> should be released.”

**Support for minority rights.** Support for minority rights (here *Kurdish rights*) was assessed by adapting nine items from Verkuyten and Yildiz (2006). These items were: “*Kurds*

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<sup>1</sup> The imprisoned leader of the PKK.

*should have the right to express their identity in cultural life,” “The Turkish government should support Kurds to maintain their own identity,” “Kurds should be allowed to establish their own schools,” “In Turkish schools, Kurds should be able to learn about their own culture and history,” “Kurds should have the right to set up their own political organizations,” “The Turkish TV should broadcast more programs by and for Kurds,” “Kurds should have the right to express and propagate their beliefs,” “Kurds in Turkey should have far more rights than they now,” and “Kurds have the right to protect and keep their own language” ( $\alpha = .81$ ).*

**Demographic variables.** Demographic variables such as gender, age, and education were asked before participants were debriefed.

## Results and Discussion

### Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses examined relations between the variables, including demographic variables. On average, Kurdish participants were highly identified with their ingroup ( $M = 3.95$ ), endorsed the independence narrative ( $M = 3.75$ ), and supported the minority rights ( $M = 4.73$ ). Bivariate correlations indicated that gender did not correlate with any of the variables; older age correlated positively with higher ingroup identification and more support for minority rights; higher education correlated negatively with less endorsement of the independence narrative (see Table 1). Bivariate correlations also indicated higher ethnic identification correlated positively with the endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights. At the same time, endorsement of the independence narrative correlated positively with support for minority rights.

[Insert Table 1]

### Mediation Analysis

We conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrapped samples (see Hayes, 2013) in order to test whether ethnic identification predicts support for minority rights through the pathway of endorsement of the independence narrative. We conducted this analysis both with<sup>2</sup> and without including gender, age and education as covariates in the model as a statistical control; these tests yielded similar results, and the full model that does not include these variables as covariates is reported below.

Results indicated that ethnic identification was a significant predictor of endorsement of the independence narrative,  $b = .337$ ,  $SE = .114$ ,  $p < .001$ , and that endorsement of the independence narrative was a significant predictor of support for minority rights,  $b = .330$ ,  $SE = .024$ ,  $p < .001$ . Ethnic identification was no longer a significant direct predictor of support for minority rights once endorsement of the independence narrative was included in the model,  $b = .109$ ,  $SE = .041$ ,  $p = .117$ . The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrap estimation approach with 5000 samples; results indicated a significant indirect effect of ethnic identification on support for minority rights,  $b = .111$ ,  $SE = .032$ , 95% CI [.05, .18].

We also tested an alternative model in which endorsement of the independence narrative would indirectly predict support for minority rights through the pathway of ethnic identification (see Uluğ et al., 2020a for a similar strategy). Results indicated that endorsement of the independence narrative was a significant predictor of ethnic identification,  $b = .337$ ,  $SE = .039$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, ethnic identification did not predict support for minority rights,  $b = .109$ ,  $SE = .041$ ,  $p = .117$ . These findings support our hypothesized model.

Study 1 found support for our hypothesis that higher ethnic identification would predict endorsement of the independence narrative, and this, in turn, would predict more support for minority rights among the minority group, Kurds. Study 1 also found support for

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<sup>2</sup> Once we included gender, age, and education as covariates in the model, these three variables did not predict support for minority rights and the indirect effect remained significant,  $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [.05, .18].

the indirect effect of ethnic identification on support for minority rights through the endorsement of the independence narrative. In addition, these effects held after accounting for participants' demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and education. As we do not know to what extent these results replicate among majority group members in a conflict context, we aimed to conduct the second study with majority group members.

## Study 2

Study 2, first, aimed to replicate and extend the results of Study 1 by demonstrating these effects are not unique to minority groups but replicate among majority groups as well. Second, we sought to extend the findings by examining how the ally identity (i.e., being an ally to Kurds) plays a role in these relationships. We focused on ally identity in the second study, in particular, for two different reasons. First, we argue that *allies* are more likely to adhere to conflict narratives that are inclusive of outgroup suffering and do not ignore ingroup-committed violence. So, allies tend to endorse the disadvantaged's conflict narrative and have support for justice for their ingroup's wrongdoings (Uluğ et al., 2020b). Second, as we aimed to collect data from the majority group in Study 2, ally identity was relevant among this sample. We believe majority group members tend to endorse minority groups' conflict narratives less, as they are more likely to worry that these narratives will pose a threat to national continuity (van Leeuwen & Mashuri, 2013). However, as allies may identify with their ingroup less (Case, 2012; Uluğ & Tropp, 2020), endorse conflict narratives that are inclusive of outgroup suffering (Uluğ et al., 2020b) and support social justice more (Brown & Ostrove, 2013), we hypothesized that the paths between (1) ethnic identification and endorsement of the independence narrative; and (2) endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights would be moderated by ally identification among majority group members. We expected that the relationship between ethnic identification and endorsement of the independence narrative would be strongest among those high in allyship



(*the first moderation hypothesis*). We, again, expected that the relationship between endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights would be strongest among those high in allyship (*the second moderation hypothesis*).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

As in Study 1, we used the same strategy to collect data (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). We recruited 271 self-identified Turkish participants. A hundred fifty-two participants self-identified as female, 104 as male, four as other, and 11 did not respond. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 72 years ( $M = 30.58$ ,  $SD = 10.47$ ). Twenty participants had completed a PhD degree, 60 an MSc degree, 143 a university degree, 34 high school, one secondary school, two primary school, and eleven did not answer. All participants completed the online questionnaire voluntarily.

### Measures

We used the same measures as those used in Study 1 to assess ethnic Turkish identification (van Zomeren et al., 2010;  $\alpha = .87$ ), endorsement of the independence narrative (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2016), and support for minority rights (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006;  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Turkish ally identification.** We created three items to assess Turkish participants' ally identification on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). These items were “*I feel strong ties with Kurds who advocate for Kurdish rights*,” “*I feel close to Kurds who advocate for Kurdish rights*,” and “*I see myself as a Turk who supports the Kurdish rights*” ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

## Results and Discussion

### Preliminary Analyses

On average, Turkish participants tended to rate their identification slightly above the mean of the scale ( $M = 2.79$ , less often endorsed the independent narrative ( $M = 1.82$ ), and

tended to show higher than average support for minority rights ( $M = 3.71$ ). Respondents had above average identification as an ally to Kurds ( $M = 3.07$ ).

Bivariate correlations indicated gender did not correlate either with ethnic Turkish identification or endorsement of the independence narrative; however, it correlated positively with higher ally identification and higher support for minority rights (see Table 2). Similar to gender, age did not correlate either with ethnic Turkish identification or endorsement of the independence narrative; however, older age correlated positively with higher ally identification and higher support for minority rights. Education did not correlate with any of the key study variables.

Unlike Study 1, bivariate correlations indicated that higher ethnic identification (i.e., Turkish identification) correlated negatively with the endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights among majority group members. Higher ethnic identification also correlated negatively with Turkish ally identification. At the same time, stronger Turkish ally identification correlated positively with the endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights. Last, as in Study 1, endorsement of the independence narrative correlated positively with support for minority rights.

[Insert Table 2]

### **Mediation Analysis**

As in Study 1, we first tested whether ethnic identification would predict support for minority rights through the pathway of endorsement of the independence narrative by using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrapped samples (see Hayes, 2013). We conducted this test of analysis both with<sup>3</sup> and without including gender, age and education as covariates in

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<sup>3</sup> Once we included gender, age, and education as covariates in the model, gender and education did not predict support for minority rights. Age was a significant predictor of support for minority rights: Older participants were significantly more likely to support minority rights ( $b = .16$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect effect remained significant,  $b = -.14$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI  $[-.19, -.10]$ .

the model as a statistical control; these tests yielded similar results, and the model that does not include these variables as covariates is reported below.

Results indicated that ethnic identification was a significant predictor of endorsement of the independence narrative,  $b = -.458$ ,  $SE = .056$ ,  $p < .001$ , and that endorsement of the independence narrative was a significant predictor of support for minority rights,  $b = .332$ ,  $SE = .050$ ,  $p < .001$ . Ethnic identification was still a significant direct predictor of support for minority rights once endorsement of the independence narrative was included in the model,  $b = -.457$ ,  $SE = .052$ ,  $p < .001$ . The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrap estimation approach with 5000 samples; results indicated a significant indirect effect of ethnic identification on support for minority rights,  $b = -.152$ ,  $SE = .020$ , 95% CI  $[-.19, -.11]$ .

### **Moderated Mediation Analysis**

We later conducted a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 58 with 5,000 bootstrapped samples (see Hayes, 2013). Specifically, we investigated the moderating effect of ally identification on the relationships between (1) ethnic identification and endorsement of the independence narrative; and (2) endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights. The results indicated that the interaction between ethnic identification and ally identification was significant,  $b = -.137$ ,  $SE = .041$ ,  $p = .001$ , suggesting ally identification moderates the effect of ethnic identification on the endorsement of the independence narrative (see Figure 3). Ethnic identification was not significant at  $-1SD$  of ally identification ( $b = -.108$ ,  $t(270) = -1.44$ ,  $p = .148$ ), but was significant at  $+1SD$  of ally identification ( $b = -.454$ ,  $t(270) = -5.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The relationship between ethnic identification and the endorsement of the independence narrative was strongest among *strong* allies, thus supporting our first moderation hypothesis.

[Insert Figure 3]

The results indicated that the interaction between endorsement of the independence narrative and ally identification was significant,  $b = -.139$ ,  $SE = .041$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 4). Endorsement of the independence narrative was significant at  $-1SD$  of ally identification ( $b = .467$ ,  $t(270) = 4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and at  $+1SD$  of ally identification ( $b = .117$ ,  $t(270) = 2.40$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, the relationship between ethnic identification and the endorsement of the independence narrative was not strongest among *strong* allies. On the contrary, the strength of the relationship was strongest among *weak* allies. The results did not support our second moderation hypothesis.

[Insert Figure 4]

Last, an index of moderated mediation was used to examine the conditional indirect effects. Tests of conditional indirect effects suggest that ethnic identification had a statistically significant indirect effect on support for minority policies via endorsing minority group's conflict narrative for higher ally identifiers ( $\beta = -.05$ , 95% CI  $[-.10, -.01]$ ) and for low ally identifiers ( $\beta = -.05$ , 95% CI  $[-.11, -.00]$ ).

Study 2 found support for our indirect effect hypothesis. For the majority group, higher ethnic identification would predict less support for minority rights through the pathway of less endorsement of the independence narrative. Unlike Study 1, the relationship between ethnic identification and support for minority rights was negative among majority group members.

Study 2 also found support for the first moderation hypothesis: the moderating effect of ally identification on the relationship between ethnic identification and endorsement of the independence narrative. As expected, the results showed that this effect was strongest among *strong* allies. However, even though we also hypothesized that the association between higher endorsement of minority group's conflict narrative and more support for minority rights

would be stronger among Turks with higher ally identification, the results do not support our second moderation hypothesis.

### **General discussion**

The present research examined the role of ethnic identification and minority group's conflict narrative on support for minority policies among a minority group (i.e., Kurds) and among a majority group (i.e., Turks) in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context in Turkey. Study 1 offered support for our hypothesis that among minority group members, stronger ethnic identification would predict more support for minority rights, via more endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative. The results suggested that identifying with the minority group is associated with more endorsement of the pro-minority narrative, and this ultimately may predict more support for pro-minority policies that help to improve the conditions of the ingroup. Given how ethnic identification may be seen as a protective factor for minority group members in terms of leading to higher self-esteem (Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997), better mental health and well-being (Çelebi et al., 2017; Zdrenka et al., 2015), and more support for ideologies that challenge the legitimacy of the status hierarchy (Levin et al., 1998), our results complement the findings on the role of ethnic identification for minority group members by showing that stronger ethnic identification may also help minority group members see the conflict from their own group's perspective and thus endorse the minority group's conflict narrative.

Even though ethnic identification has some positive outcomes for minority group members, it also has adverse consequences for intergroup relations. As mentioned earlier, stronger ethnic identification is associated with more negative views of (Negy et al., 2003) or negative attitudes toward outgroup members (Bağcı & Çelebi, 2017). For ethnic minority groups whose rights are continuously denied or not acknowledged by majority group members in conflict contexts, these negative views or attitudes toward outgroups may be

*justifiable* because these views may protect minority group members from superficial reconciliation (for a discussion on victim groups, see Nadler, 2012). Therefore, ingroup identification for minority group members may be seen as a double-edged sword: leading to more positive outcomes for the ingroup, whereas having the potential to lead to more negative consequences for intergroup relations (see, e.g., Uluğ, Bilali, Karasu & Malo, in press).

The findings of Study 2 also offered support for the hypothesis that ethnic identification would predict support for minority rights via endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative among majority group members. However, as hypothesized, the direction was in the opposite direction for the majority group: identifying with the majority identity is associated with less endorsement of the pro-minority conflict narrative and ultimately predicts less support for pro-minority policies. The findings of the second study complemented the findings of the first study by showing that ethnic identification has different outcomes for minority and majority group members. Previous research indicated that highly identified majority group members are less inclined to recognize inequality (Doosje et al., 1998), more likely to show negative attitudes toward minorities and derogate them (Mummendey et al., 2001; Stewart et al., 2012; Verkuyten, 2005), and more likely to be motivated to protect the interests of their ingroup (Lowery et al., 2006). In addition, strong ethnic identification among majority group members is associated with less support for minority rights (Verkuyten, 2006) and especially language rights (Çelebi et al., 2016). Our results extend Verkuyten and his colleagues' research by indicating how endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative in this identification-support for minority policies link works among both minority and majority groups. In ethnic-based conflict contexts, ethnic identification provides the precondition to form shared beliefs related to conflict (Bar-Tal & Oren, 2000), and it is these beliefs that may shape people's attitudes towards policies in conflict and peacebuilding processes.

Across two studies, the results were as expected: the more groups endorsed the minority group's conflict narrative, the more they supported pro-minority policies. As mentioned earlier, studies conducted in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and Israeli-Palestinian conflict contexts showed that endorsement of the pro-minority narrative is associated with positive attitudes toward reconciliation (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017), less competitive victimhood and support for aggressive policies, more support for non-violent conflict resolution among the majority group members (Uluğ et al., 2020a) and more solidarity with the minority (Uluğ, 2020) among majority group members. Our results contribute to this burgeoning literature by showing that endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative may predict support for policies that aim to reinstate minority rights as well.

Studies conducted in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict context have also shown that endorsement of the majority group's conflict narrative (i.e., the ethos of conflict) reduces support for compromise and peaceful conflict resolution (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Canetti et al., 2017; Porat et al., 2015). Our results also show the importance of examining the effects of alternative conflict narratives to provide a more comprehensive perspective on conflict narratives and their effects on conflict resolution as well as to capture the complexity of a particular conflict and its consequences (see Cohrs et al., 2015). These alternative conflict narratives may pave the way for conflict resolution due to their potential to increase openness to compromise and diversify the social realities that circulate in society. Thus, our results complement the research conducted by Bar-Tal and others on the ethos of conflict and deepen the discussion about the consequences of endorsing different conflict narratives on conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Uluğ et al., 2020a), especially by showing what happens when endorsed by majority group members.

Study 2 found support for the first moderation hypothesis (the moderating effect of ally identification on the relationship between ethnic identification and endorsement of the

independence narrative). As expected, this effect was strongest among *strong* allies. In other words, among *strong* allies, low ethnic identity was associated with more endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative. Considering that allies tend to have higher awareness of privilege (Ostrove & Brown, 2018), be more ingroup critical (Case, 2012), as well as less identify with their advantaged identity (Uluğ & Tropp, 2020), our results complement previous findings by showing that when majority group members strongly identify as allies, their lower ethnic identification is associated with more endorsement of the minority group's conflict narrative. Put it differently, lower ethnic identification among majority group members helps to see the conflict from the eyes of minority group members when majority group members strongly identify as allies.

The findings of Study 2 did not support our second moderation hypothesis that the relationship between endorsement of the independence narrative and support for minority rights among majority group members would be stronger among allies. Unexpectedly, the results showed that the effect was strongest among *weak* allies, whereas it was weakest among *strong* allies. While this finding was unexpected, when examined closely, we noticed that the pro-minority policy items we used in both studies focus on cultural rights, identity rights, and language rights. One explanation for this finding might be that these policies may not be enough for *strong* allies as strong allies to Kurds in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context may support more radical rights such as self-determination for an independent Kurdistan. As the minority group's conflict narrative frames the Turkish-Kurdish conflict as an independence problem for Kurds, even though allies in general support minority rights, *strong* allies may have different preferences to support Kurds compared to *weak* allies. One study has shown that allies have different positions on what their role as allies to disadvantaged group members should be (Selvanathan et al., 2020b). We believe that Turkish allies also have different positions on how to support Kurds in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict



context (e.g., from supporting language rights to supporting an independent Kurdistan). Given allies are more likely to endorse inclusive conflict narratives (Uluğ et al., 2020b) and to advocate egalitarian ideals and social justice (Ashburn-Nardo, 2018), our results complement these findings by showing that endorsing minority narratives also have the potential to shape majority group members' support for minority policies. However, it is fair to argue that their support is dependent on the degree of allyship to the minority in each context.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Our studies have a few limitations. We collected data online by using social media platforms, and we used snowball and convenience sampling techniques. Therefore, we believe that we reached out to a politicized sample by using our own social media networks. We are aware that this type of data collection strategy is susceptible to sampling errors (e.g., producing biased samples; Farrokhi, & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). For that reason, we tested our hypotheses in both studies, both with and without including control variables (i.e., age, gender, and education), and control these effects to a certain extent. As mentioned earlier, in our sample, the majority group members tended to self-identify as an ally to Kurds (even more than the overall population in Turkey). Even though this politicized sample gave us a unique opportunity to test how ally identification moderates the hypothesized relationships, future studies should also make a more concerted effort to get a more heterogeneous sample among majority group members in Turkey (e.g., people who are against the Kurdish movement or who do not support Kurdish rights).

The second limitation of the present work is that our two studies rely on mediation analyses. However, using cross-sectional data for mediation analysis has some shortcomings (see, e.g., Fiedler, Schott, & Meiser, 2011). As cross-sectional data make any conclusion based on these analyses risky (Maxwell, Cole, & Mitchell, 2011), future studies should also

test these hypotheses by using experimental designs (e.g., manipulating conflict narratives) as well as using longitudinal designs.

The Turkish-Kurdish conflict is an extremely sensitive topic in Turkey, and we should note that we collected the data for both studies in late 2018 and early 2019 after the peace process ended in 2015 and in an atmosphere where people are easily charged with terrorism due to their closeness to the Kurdish movement. For example, in Turkey, both Kurds who demand their rights in general or in protests in particular and people who are allies to Kurds may face charges of “terrorist activities” (see, e.g., Academics for Peace; Acar & Coşkan, 2020). Given that the Turkish participants in Study 2 supported the Kurdish minority rights and identified as an ally to Kurds but less endorsed the independence narrative, one can question especially the sincerity of Turkish participants. However, we believe that it is totally understandable for some Turkish participants to support the Kurdish minority rights and self-identify as an ally to Kurds without endorsing the independence narrative. Indeed, previous research has shown that Turks endorse different conflict narratives such as 1) terrorism narrative, 2) economic narrative, 3) democracy and Islam narrative, 4) democracy and rights narrative as well as 5) independence narrative (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017). Among those five narratives, especially these two narratives—the democracy and rights narrative and the independence narrative—are common among Turks who support Kurdish rights and/or the Kurdish movement. However, their attitudes toward independence for Kurds differ from each other. Future studies should also use these different conflict narratives and test the antecedents and outcomes of endorsing 1) democracy and rights narrative and 2) independence narrative as well as develop alternative tools to measure these conflict narratives, especially among self-identified allies. Future studies should also use shorter narratives to avoid multi-dimensionality in those studies.

Another limitation is related to allyship identification. We used a continuous variable to measure ally identification. Previous studies measured allyship either as a categorical variable (Uluğ et al., 2020b) or indirectly (e.g., who identify as “allies” and have taken at least some prior action to promote racial justice; Uluğ & Tropp, 2020). As we know that the meaning attached to group identity is important in driving the effects of ingroup identification (Bilali, Iqbal, & Çelik, 2018), future studies should examine what allyship means not only for minority group members (see, e.g., Brown & Ostrove, 2013) but also for majority group members, especially in conflict contexts.

In addition, we did not include allyship items in Study 1, as these items were specifically constructed to measure Turks’ allyship. Future questions may be asked to unpack the allyship concept in conflict contexts. For example, does allyship come only from the majority group? What happens when the minority group members become allies to majority group members and how this allyship moderate the effects of ingroup identification and endorsement of conflict narratives on support for their own rights? Future studies should also examine these relationships from the perspective of minority group members.

In both studies, we did not ask about where the Kurdish and Turkish participants reside. For example, we do not know if they live in a) the Western regions (i.e., many internally displaced Kurds migrated such as the Aegean or the Marmara region) or b) the Eastern regions (i.e., densely populated by the Kurds such as the Eastern Anatolia or the Southeastern Anatolia region). As previous studies have shown both intergroup contact between Turks and Kurds (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2017) and their residence in these different regions (Uluğ, Odağ, Cohrs & Holtz, 2017) may shape their perspectives on conflict, future studies should also focus on how their residence in these regions may play an important role their support for minority rights.

Future studies may also investigate how political ideology plays an important role in endorsing minority group's conflict narrative. For example, it is known that Turkish socialists endorse the independence narrative more than other Turks who share different political ideologies (e.g., Kemalism). Even though Turkish and Kurdish socialists formed alliances to fight against the discriminatory policies against Kurds and introduced the language of Kurdish rights into political parties in the past as well (Watts, 2007), Turkish communists, on the other hand, did not always support the Kurdish movement (e.g., 2015 elections) and the independence Kurdistan idea. Therefore, future studies should also take political ideologies of participants into account not only in examining allyship but also in investigating the endorsement of different conflict narratives.

Although we focused on the role of ethnic identification across both minority and majority groups in these studies, we did not focus on citizenship identification (i.e., Turkish citizenship). However, we do not know to what extent we would find consistent results if we examined citizenship identification. Studies investigating the association between ethnic and citizenship identities and outgroup attitudes in different contexts found inconsistent results (Hindriks, Verkuyten & Coenders, 2014): Sometimes no relationship between citizenship identification and positive attitudes towards Kurds (Korkmaz & Uluğ, 2020), whereas sometimes leading to more positive attitudes towards Kurds (Bağcı & Çelebi, 2017). Future studies should focus on how citizenship identification is related to endorsing the minority group's conflict narrative and supporting minority rights.

In addition to ethnic and citizenship identification, future studies should focus on the religious identification of both minority and majority group members. Baysu and Coşkan (2018) showed that among Kurds, stronger religious identification as Muslim was associated with more support for reconciliation, while stronger ethnic identification as Kurdish had the opposite effect. Similarly, Ekmekci (2011) argues that the religiousness of Kurds may

influence Kurds' tendency to support Kurdish ethnonationalism through affecting overall ideology. Therefore, future studies need to take those different modes of identifications into account when studying conflict narratives and intergroup-related outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

In both studies, we investigated the role of ethnic identification and its outcomes for intergroup relations concerning a minority group (Kurds) and a majority group (Turks). Our results highlight how identifying with one's group and the group's status (majority, minority or ally) in society may be related to intergroup outcomes such as support for minority rights. It is our hope that our studies may pave the way for positive intergroup relations between minority and majority groups in conflict contexts by demonstrating how 1) ethnic identity (albeit depending on group status), 2) ally identity, and 3) minority conflict narratives may become facilitators to supporting policies that aim to improve the position of minority groups in society.

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Table 1

*Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables in Study 1.*

Variables	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	-	-					
2. Age	30.85 (8.43)	.14	-				
3. Education	4.09 (.77)	-.11	.13	-			
4. Ethnic identification	3.95 (.77)	.04	.15*	-.05	-		
5. Endorsement of the independence narrative	3.75 (1.32)	.06	.04	-.14*	.34***	-	
6. Support for minority rights	4.73 (.46)	.12	.15*	.01	.22**	.37***	-

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

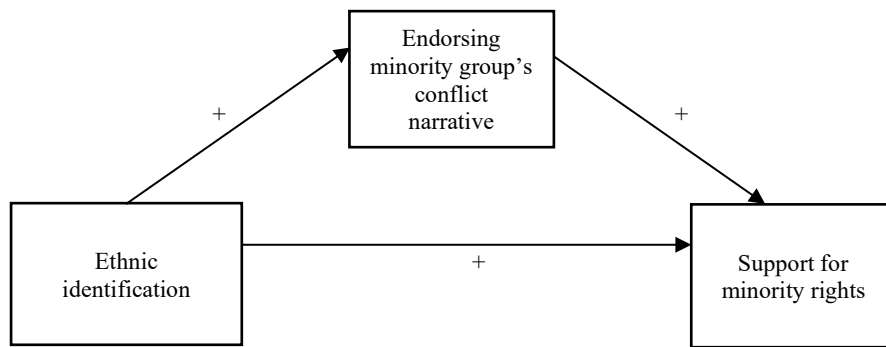


Table 2

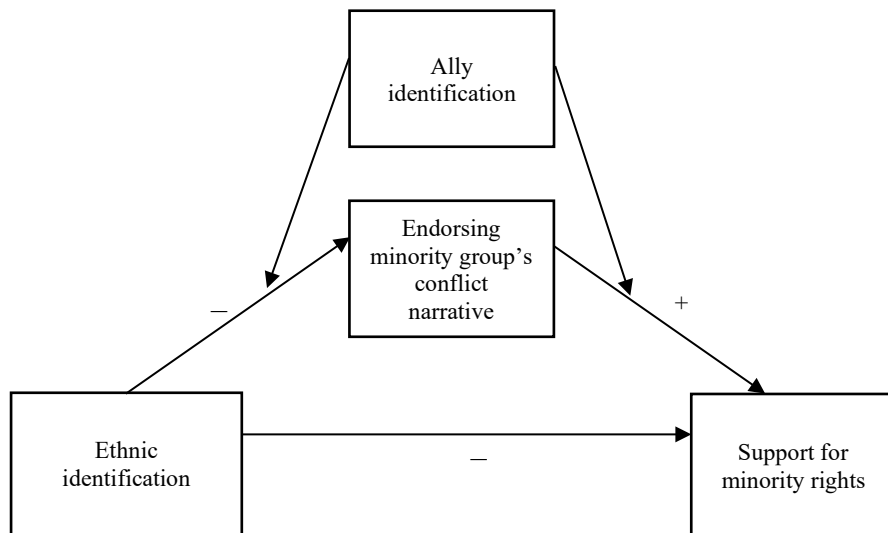
*Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables in Study 2.*

Variables	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	-	-						
2. Age	30.58 (10.47)	-.15*	-					
3. Education	4.22 (.84)	-.18**	.21**	-				
4. Ethnic identification	2.79 (1.10)	-.17**	-.03	-.08	-			
5. Turkish ally identification	3.07 (1.26)	.13*	.16*	-.01	-.52***	-		
6. Endorsement of the independence narrative	1.82 (1.15)	.21**	.02	-.04	-.46***	.53***	-	
7. Support for minority rights	3.71 (1.14)	.14*	.19**	.09	-.61***	.69***	.54***	-

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .



*Figure 1.* Path diagram of the theoretical model among minority group members.



*Figure 2.* Path diagram of the theoretical model among majority group members.

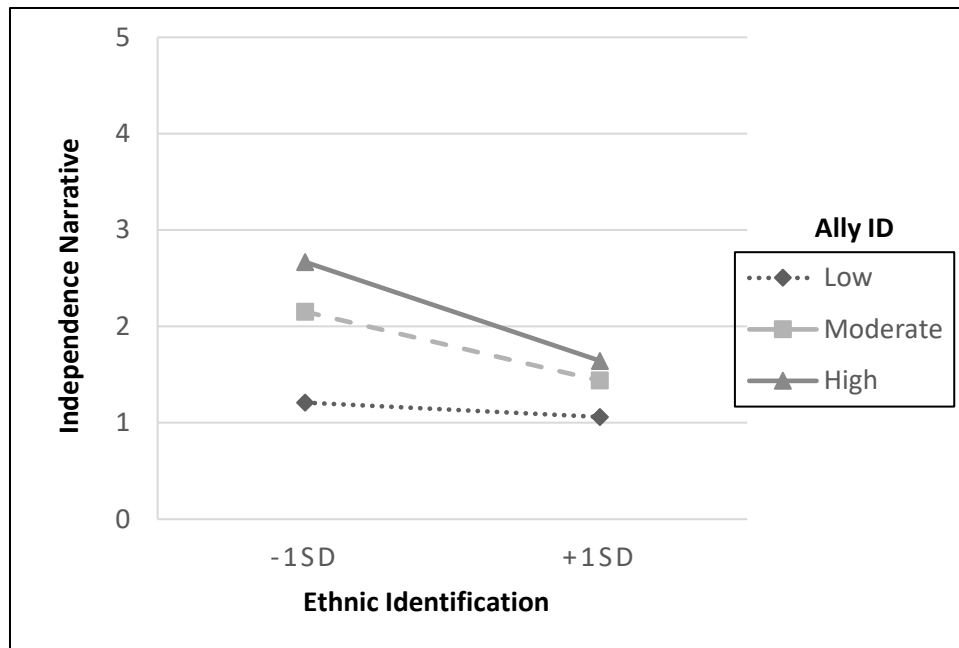
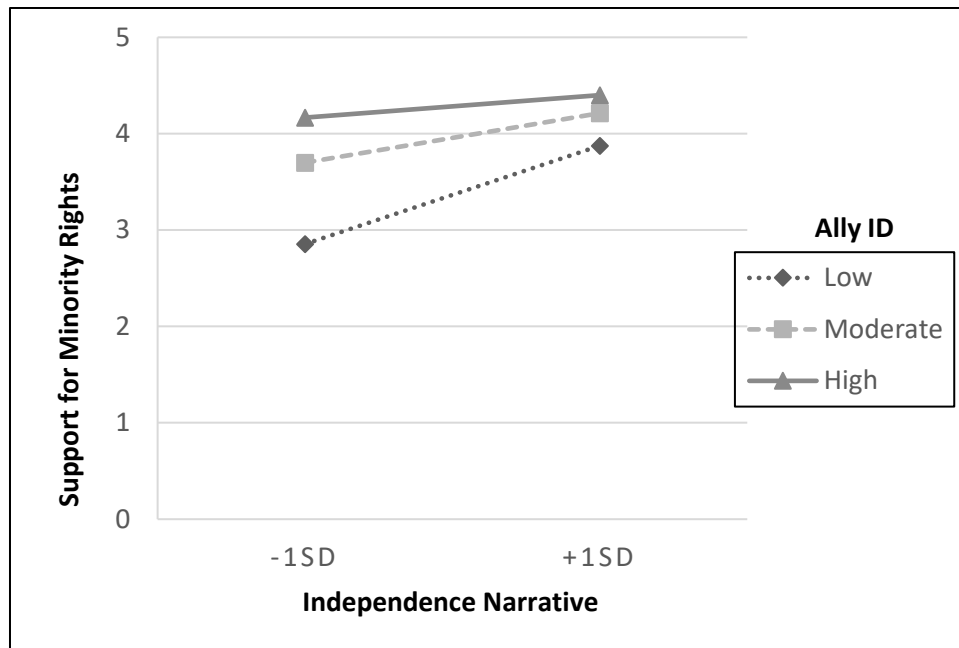


Figure 3. The interaction of ethnic identification and ally identification on the endorsement of the independence narrative.



*Figure 4.* The interaction of endorsement of the independence narrative and ally identification on supporting minority rights.